

Vision 21 Implementation Committee
Meeting Minutes
December 1, 2005 (Accepted December 15, 2005)

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Members Present: Austin Bliss, Donna Brescia, Vinnie DeNovellis, Victoria Hasse, Meg O'Brien, Sara Oaklander, Jennifer Page, Paul Santos, Paul Solomon

Members absent: Ann Rittenburg

1. Administrivia

Corrections were made to the minutes of November 17, 2005 and subsequently they were approved unanimously.

2. Revisiting the "Rules of the Game"

Jennifer reviewed the agreements made at the last meeting (see minutes of 11/17/05, section 2.2). She then offered some additional suggestions, as follows, which received no objection:

- Air Traffic Controller – Members should look to the chair for acknowledgement before speaking so that she can manage the flow of the discussion. Jennifer added that she prefers to handle this a bit more informally to allow us to proceed with conversations by building on one another's comments and without a lot of intervention.
- Headlines – Members are encouraged to learn to talk in headlines or, in other words, to give the main idea first and follow it with supporting comments.
- Baby Ideas – Often people have an idea that is not yet fully developed and we should be mindful of not "stepping on" those ideas. Instead, we can all take responsibility to make sure all ideas are fully considered, explored and fostered.

3. Update on scheduling of topical meetings

3.1 – December 15: Business initiative. We will discuss the "Is Belmont Business Friendly?" initiative of the Vision Implementation Committee (VIC) and Sara Oaklander will present about the work of the Business and Economic Development Planning Group (BEDPG). Materials that members should review in preparation for this discussion include the "Is Belmont Business Friendly?" report dated February 2003 and the final BEDPG report dated March 2005.

3.2 – January 5: Public Information and Communications Planning Group. Jim Fitzgerald will join Meg in talking with us about the status of PICPG's recommendations. Members should review the PICPG report in preparation.

3.3 – January 19 (tentative): Belmont Neighbors Network. Kathryn Bonfiglio has confirmed that she can join us on this date; we are still waiting to hear from her co-chair, Adine Storer.

4. Discussion: What will we expect to accomplish at each of these meetings? How should the discussions be structured?

Jennifer introduced this discussion by reminding us that there may be a difference between the meetings where we are reviewing reports and those where we are in a more open-ended discussion.

After much discussion and debate, the committee agreed to use the following questions to guide our discussions on each of the initiatives:

Regarding each of the recommendations made:

- Was it implemented 100%? If not, why not?
- If it was implemented, was it effective? If not, why not?
- Have new solutions emerged to the problems addressed in each recommendation?
- Is further action called for? (Given what we have learned, do we have a responsibility to take further action?) This might include short-term, immediate action steps and also inclusion in long-term goals.

The committee noted that it is possible that we may discover that certain recommendations no longer make sense or were not possible. In addition, some discussion ensued regarding the need to make sure we get at whether changes made actually accomplished what we set out to accomplish. We need to look at the big picture, as well as at the status of each of the recommendations made. Concern was expressed regarding whether we will we do that by considering whether or not there is further action to be taken by the VIC. We agreed to be mindful of this as we proceed.

Further discussion focused on arrangements related to the meeting on the business initiative. One member suggested that it will be of value to have the new Town planner in attendance when we discuss the status of our work on the business initiative. Town Administrator Tom Younger and Planning Coordinator Jeffrey Wheeler should perhaps attend, as well. Another member suggested that given that Paul Solomon has been the primary champion of the business initiative, it is of concern that he will be unable to attend the discussion. Another member suggested that we hold two meetings on this topic, which is an extensive one. The first can be a chance for all VIC members to become more familiar with the details of the initiative and clarify what more we need to find out, while the second can include other people from Town and will give us a chance to further explore the current status of the effort.

It was noted that this approach may make sense for the discussion on the information and communications initiative, as well.

5. Planning for other possible meetings

Jennifer reviewed the remaining areas of focus and the committee determined next steps, as follows:

5.1 – Education. Jennifer reported on a discussion with Ann Rittenburg regarding how the VIC might become involved with the issue of education in Belmont. One possibility is to start by informing the Superintendent and the School Committee of our interest and let them tell us what they think we should do. A different approach would be for us to first deliberate on the issue and determine our areas of interest. It was agreed that this latter approach makes the

most sense for two reasons. One, the School Committee is immersed in budget work now and will be for some time to come. Second, the VIC has limited resources and should first determine not only what interests us about education in Belmont but also what we feel we can reasonably offer to do. In addition, our scope goes beyond the public school system to include adult learning. The VIC agreed to set aside a meeting to discuss education, to make sure our discussion defines education more broadly than public education while also including the public schools, and that at that time we will develop the questions that need to be addressed with regard to education.

5.2 – Environment. Jennifer shared her thoughts about whether or not we should reflect on this area at this time. She made several points, including:

- A decision will need to be made about whether or not another environmental fair will be held, but additional people beyond the VIC need to be involved in this discussion.
- Sustainable Belmont is already scheduled to report to us annually, which will be in February.
- The “environmental conversations” happened a while ago and included Town department heads as well as others from the community. A lengthy report containing information about what was already happening in town was prepared but never circulated outside of the VIC. Since then, much more has occurred with regard to Belmont’s efforts to become more environmentally friendly as a Town.

Paul Santos gave some background on the work of Sustainable Belmont, which includes a focus on development of a Climate Action Plan and various other activities.

Subsequent discussion resulted in an agreement that we should schedule a discussion on the environmental issue with the chairs of Sustainable Belmont and other key people in order to get an update on new developments in Town with regard to environmental stewardship.

5.3 – Planning. Various comments were made regarding this issue:

- Paul Solomon reported that the Warrant Committee has formed a subcommittee on regional planning, which is a challenging arena. He suggested that it may make sense for us to hold off on doing more on this for now, until we see where the Warrant Committee goes with it.
- Jennifer reminded us that the vision refers to local and regional planning and that the VIC has had some significant impact on local planning, including the Waverley Square Fire Station, Trapelo Road, and the Belmont Center Planning Group. When it comes to regional planning, however, it is less clear what role the VIC can play.
- One member suggested that we need an issue around which to galvanize, such as the Waverley Square Fire Station, and that we are better off waiting to see what comes up. Not everyone agreed with this approach.
- Some of the newer members expressed an interest in learning more about this issue and what the VIC has done to date.

Agreement was reached to keep the issue of planning on the list as a lower priority, to follow the work of the Warrant Committee on this issue, and to revisit the issue at a later date.

5.4 – Vision. Jennifer reported that she asked Meg O’Brien to think about the question of how to revisit the vision statement and to present to the group various models for how we might engage the community in that effort. This discussion will take place at a later date.

The group agreed that the upcoming five-year anniversary of the date on which Town Meeting adopted the vision – April 23, 2001 – will be an appropriate time to report to the Town what we have done and what we intend to do going forward with regard to the vision statement.

6. Meeting Evaluation

Jennifer invited members to comment on what worked well and what can be improved upon. Comments included:

- Parking Lot – During the meeting, one new item was added to the “parking lot” – the a question of how do we define “business friendly.” Concerns were then expressed about the growing size of the Parking Lot and it was agreed that we would spend ten minutes at the end of each meeting visiting items that remain on the list.
- This was a good meeting in that we covered a lot of ground.
- The meeting seemed purposeful, which is a good thing.

7. Next Meeting

Thursday, December 15th, 2005 from 7-9 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Oaklander
Secretary Pro Tempore